



Connect to the Future Work Group Recommendations

As Approved January 26, 2020

The Connect to the Future (CttF) Work Group was convened by the Connect Transit Board of Trustees to engage the community in questions related to the essential role of transit in Bloomington-Normal: As an evolving community, what do we want our mobility platform to be in Bloomington/Normal? How does transit figure into the daily lives of our citizens, some of whom rely on Connect and Connect Mobility as a most-basic resource? What new opportunities have we yet to imagine about what Connect might offer the entire riding public?

Work Group members, listed in alphabetical order, include: Josh Barnett, Tim Bassett, Judy Buchanan (Connect Transit Trustee and co-chair), Marty Eckert, Linda Foster (Connect Transit Citizens Advisory Board), Julie Hile (Connect Transit Trustee and co-chair), Dylan Hile-Broad, Katy Killian, Kim Klepek, Steven Kossman, Deborah Presley, and De Urban. We were supported during portions of the process by consultants from Smart Growth America.

CttF sat together for the first time in June 2019 and met eight times in full and more frequently in the subgroup areas of *Access and Ridership*, *Economic Development Partnership*, *Land Use*, and *Sustainable Funding*. Deep research and learning led to intense discussion. The attached “Background Material” is intended for those who wish to better understand our research and process. The below recommendations are consensus-based, and they conclude our work.

Framing Ideas

We, the Connect to the Future Work Group:

- Envision Connect Transit as a community-invested, well-resourced, and expertly operated public service that many in our community rely on for daily living. We want a system that is outstanding—affordable, accessible, and equitable in its care for our most transit-reliant population—as well as in its appeal for all riders.
- Offer our recommendations as an integrated, systems-based approach. The more comprehensively we implement these recommendations, the more momentum we build toward the public transit system our community deserves up to and someday perhaps including a full fare-free system.
- Underscore that as currently funded and operated, Connect Transit will become insolvent by 2026. This funding gap is real, and solving it is an essential top priority.
- Emphasize that qualification for improved capture of Illinois Department of Transportation Downstate Operating Assistance Program (DOAP) matching dollars is the most desirable means of increasing Connect Transit’s funding stream. DOAP will cover 65% of increased operating expenses from the changes we recommend *with the balance needed in local funding*.

Sustainable Funding

1. One Rate for All
 - Raise the fixed route one-way rate from \$1 to \$1.25 for all riders.
 - Reduce Connect Mobility one-way rates from \$2.00/\$3.00/\$4.00 to \$1.25.
 - Revise the rate of the monthly unlimited pass for all Connect Mobility and fixed route riders to \$40, with a fare capping option for all.
2. To support these recommendations and address the structural deficit in how Connect Transit is funded, increase the City of Bloomington and Town of Normal combined annual investments by \$500,000, in a phased approach.

Fiscal Year 2020-2021	}	Town: \$100,000 increase per year
Fiscal Year 2021-2022		City: \$150,000 increase per year

This \$500,000 will ensure continued qualification for DOAP dollars which brings total combined funding to \$1,428,571.

Note Recommendation #7 re the “MyConnect” public engagement campaign as a means of building broad taxpayer support for increased investment of municipal resources in Bloomington/Normal public transportation.

3. Reframe expanded Universal Access partnerships (higher contracts, more partners) with “MyConnect Champions” as investments in a stronger public transit system for the benefit of all.
4. Explore the possibility of additional DOAP funding through municipalities transferring to Connect dollars currently budgeted for sidewalks adjacent to bus stops.

Service Expansion

5. Extend Connect Mobility service to the City and Town limits.

Fare Free Pilot

6. Pilot Fare-Free transit on the backbone of our current system: the Green Route. Use a 6- to 12-month pilot to engage Normal and Bloomington riders in the experiment of zero-fare public transit and gather ridership data that is clear, measurable, and performance-based. For example:
 - Ridership: total riders, first-time Connect Mobility riders, and first-time general population riders
 - Level of rider satisfaction from surveys and focus groups
 - Ontime performance (timely, reliable, consistent, practical resource)
 - Business community endorsement of Connect based on increased use of the Green by employees and customers/clients/patients

Gather, analyze, and post results data with maximum transparency, relying on it to inform continuation decisions. Continuation would require additional funding by a combination of public and private dollars.

“MyConnect” Community Education and Engagement

7. Best-practices-based community campaign educating riders of all kinds about the benefits of public transportation: the Connect community, results of the Green Route pilot, economic development, environmental justice, equity, affordability, Bloomington/Normal pride and connection. Engage community partners, build public confidence in Connect, and increase ridership.
8. Add Business, ISU student, and Heartland student members to Connect Transit Advisory Committee.

Policy

9. Regularly review Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) to ensure it is current and reflects the intentions of these recommendations.

Infrastructure and Land Use

10. Continue Better Bus Stops campaign.
 - Complete 90 stops in 2020 and increase pace by 20% each year for 100% completion of current stops by 2024.
 - Prioritize bus stops to be upgraded based on frequency of wheelchair ramp deployment and ridership.
11. Advocate for Downtown Transportation Center.
12. Commit to Transit-Supportive Development.
 - Redefine Connect Transit as a primary planning partner, creating mechanisms in Bloomington and Normal municipal governments that require Agency participation in ordinance and code review.
 - Include Connect Transit review of specific development construction plans, factoring their consultation into development decisions before submission to City and Town Council for approval.

Future Action with Additional Funding

13. Pilot additional fixed route and/or on-demand service to select high-density areas.
 - Prioritize target areas according to most-current census data like that sourced in the McLean County Regional Planning Commission Connect Transit Short-Range Transit Plan density map.
 - Improve pilot design by partnering with the social service agencies which represent prospective new riders.
 - Gather, post, and analyze results data with maximum transparency, relying on it to inform continuation decisions.

Continuation would require additional funding by a combination of public and private dollars.